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FREEDOM, RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY IN THE AGE OF THE 24/7 NEWS CYCLE: A DUTCH PERSPECTIVE

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BENJAMIN: -- religion and democracy in the age of the 24/7 news cycle, a Dutch perspective, with Bert Koenders, Dutch Minister for Development and Cooperation.

You know, particularly since 9/11, I think we've all been recognizing that we are in an era when we are grappling with different aspects of globalization. Even before 9/11 we all recognized that we were grappling with issues of destabilizing capital flows. We have seen a rather substantial rise in immigration n many different parts of the world, so flows of human capital, as well.

And I think no aspect of globalization is more important than the flow of different ideas into different communities, different societies and different parts of the world.

For those of us who study, as I do, extremism and radicalism, there's been a lot of attention to the development of what the French sociologist, Olivier Roy has called the "virtual ummah." And there's been a lot of interest in it -- in the transferral of a rather, and occasionally, dangerous, set of ideas.

But equally important is not what goes on just inside radical circles, but how ideas that are mooted, or images that are viewed in one part of the world affect large communities in another part of the world.

The number of aspects, the number of instances of this, any one of us could count many of them. The most recent -- and I know the one that the Minister will touch on -- has to do with Geerd Wilders and his controversial film “Fitna.” One could also talk, in the Dutch context, about the late artist Theo Van Gogh’s movies and his other provocations, and the kinds of responses that they elicited.

One could talk about the Danish cartoon scandal, and the protests that resulted because of that episode. One could talk about the desecration of the Koran at Guantanamo, or the remarks of an American General and senior Pentagon official that he knew that his god was bigger than the Muslim god, and therefore he was sure that we would win -- a day that I recall, or an episode that I recall we interviewed for a book I wrote, an American public affairs official who said it was the worst day of his career. Because, while it was barely news in the U.S., it was non-stop news in Southeast Asia, where he was posted.

Well, as you can tell by the title of this address, Bert Koenders is sensitive and alive to the issues, and how we will be forced to negotiate between different values, and our own commitments to freedom and freedom of speech and freedom of religion, and the promotion of democracy, and how these are all juxtaposed by this very fascinating but, shall we say, highly charged set of issues.

I'm going to turn the podium over to him in one second, and afterwards we will have a bit of a discussion about his address.

Let me just say that Bert Koenders was appointed Minister for Development Cooperation in early 2007. He has long experience in this area, having been involved in the governing council of the Society for International Development. He was chairman of the board of the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank. And, of course, he is well educated on these issues because of all the time he spent here on Massachusetts Avenue earlier in his life, when he studied at Johns Hopkins/SAIS.

It's my great pleasure to introduce Minister for Development Cooperation, Bert Koenders.

(Applause)

MINISTER KOENDERS: Well, thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, I want to start by thanking you for this opportunity to address you here today.

The Brookings Institution is one of the greatest institutes in the world when it comes to offering a stage to voices of reason in turbulent times of increasing social, economic, political and also religious divides in the world.

It's true, when I did my graduate studies across the street at Johns Hopkins, Brookings was already an important source of knowledge and inspiration. It's not only anymore Brookings. We just drove up here from Union Station, and I saw it's the opening day of the Museum of Free Speech in Washington, D.C. So it is a specifically nice day for me to be able to address you on this issue.

These days, my country, The Netherlands, is less and less portrayed as a country of relative calm, liberal and tolerant attitudes, tulips and wooden shoes. More and more, we make the press by discussions on stigma, on Islam, and Islamophobia, on political upheaval, and by the political murder of a politician and film-maker who stood up for freedom of speech, against illiberal Islamic voices.

Both images -- as always -- are caricatures. But caricatures always have an element of truth in them. And what is true of this caricature is paradoxically not different (off mike) -- is paradoxically not different from what happens all over the world: namely, a fierce debate on the rights of self-definition, of nations, and social and religious groups, in a time of migration, globalization and an increased sense of risk that these developments create for all of us, including the risk of restricting of civil liberties.

This issue is important for me also as a Minister for Development Cooperation.

Now, big trends and dilemmas become real when fundamental principles are at stake -- freedom of expression, freedom of religion -- now so hotly debated in my society, in European societies and elsewhere -- in our parliament, and among citizens in rich and poor countries alike.

Now, one of our Dutch parliamentarians recently made this movie -- you mentioned it already -- “Fitna,” depicting the horrors of terrorism in New York, in Madrid and elsewhere, linking them in direct and digital terms to the Koran and, indirectly, to migration in the Netherlands. That was what the movie was about -- the depicting of New York, Madrid, acts of terror, book of the Koran and migration of Muslims in the Netherlands.

Naturally, such a film became the subject of fierce debate in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

Now, my government had to take a position on this. What happens if one of your citizens, in the context of what happened in Denmark and elsewhere, is making such a movie? We had to take our responsibility standing for the freedom of expression, but reconciling it with the need to warn for the repercussions the announcement of this film and

its showing could have for our society and elsewhere in the world. And we have seen some of these repercussions in some countries, there's been some calls for boycott of Dutch products -- although not comparable to any of the movements that we saw during the time of the Danish cartoons. But, obviously, we didn't know that beforehand.

Now, when the film came out, Prime Minister Balkenende, the Dutch Prime Minister, made it very clear eye condemns the depicted acts of terror -- obviously -- carried out in the name of Islam, or otherwise. And he added that the vast majority of Muslims do reject extremism and violence as well, in fact, victims are often also Muslims. Ninety-three percent of Muslims worldwide want more freedom and reject any acts of violence, according to a recent Gallup poll.

So we should -- is what the Prime Minister, in fact, was saying -- form an alliance with that majority, rather than stigmatizing, and therewith, isolating the Muslims, as has been in this movie "Fitna."

This message was clearly distributed by our ministers, by the cabinet, around the world. And the broadcasts were clear on this movie.

Now, let me start by giving you a quote as one of the reactions to this film. Let me quote.

"Dutch Member of Parliament Geerd Wilders released his movie 'Fitna,' attacking Muslims and the Koran, amidst wide international

worries that airing the movie would only lead to further cross-cultural tensions and perhaps violence. Influential Muslim figures, including some Salafi Saudi scholars had threatened to boycott the Netherlands, while official figures in Iran threatened to review diplomatic relations with the country if the film was aired.

"Once again, the overall cross-cultural scene seemed less than promising. Thankfully --" -- and I still am on this quote—"the reaction of Dutch Muslims was sedate. Moderates of both sides should make a quick move to prevent radicals from determining the course of events surrounding this debate.

"The Dutch constitution prevents the government from banning the moving, and I'm personally skeptical towards any attempts to silence an idea. Such subjective decisions open the door for totalitarian regimes to restrict the freedom of expression of their opposition.

"Boycotts are the red flags that send alarm signals when things seem to be getting out of control. They also signal the failure of sustaining a constructive dialogue that is based on mutual respect and appreciation of diversity.

"But successful dialogue never takes place over a few days or weeks. In fact, it would be impossible for such a discourse to cover the

wide range of contentious cross-cultural issues in a few sessions -- especially with mounting frustration and mutual mistrust.

"It should therefore be ongoing and take different forms, including student exchange programs, seminars, lectures, and so on and so forth.

"Freedom of expression has been increasingly manipulated over the past few years, and has been used as a pretext for insults -- one that contributes to widening the gap between different cultures and civilizations.

"To ensure this freedom is not compromised, moderates on both sides should step in and find a sustainable mechanism to bridge the divides in our increasingly globalized world, in which racism and radicalism have a devastating effect on everyone." End of quote.

Ladies and gentlemen, this quote was not recorded from a Western liberal philosopher. In fact, this quote is an excerpt for an article by Ibrahim El-Houdaiby, a prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

I found that a promising quote, as it shows a chance for dialogue and debate by, in this particular case, a group which at least has ambiguous positions to democratic principles.

Let me put also this movie, and the way it was brought on the Dutch internet, the international internet in the context of what we have seen in Dutch politics over the last seven or eight years.

It reflects a debate in society, in our cities, between our citizens, that concerns many interrelated issues, such as the freedom of speech, freedom of religion, respect for each others' belief, and national identity in a globalizing world. And we have some problems with that in Europe at the moment.

We have witnessed the murder of a leading politician, Pym Fortuyn, the first political murder in the Netherlands in 400 years, and then the murder of a well known artist -- you mentioned it -- Theo Van Gogh. Lastly, we have seen a Dutch politician claiming that Islam equals fascism, and that the Koran equals *Mein Kampf*.

This turbulence is something that we are not used to in the Netherlands -- or something we had not experienced in a long time. We were a society, as I said, that was at least seen to be tolerant, open-minded, where people could live the life that they wanted, believe what they wanted to believe, side by side with, and tolerating the life that others wanted to lead or the beliefs that they held dear.

That society has changed dramatically over the past few decades. Immigration, the internet age, secularism, and enormous growth

in wealth, globalization, an expanding European Union -- all factors that came relatively quickly over the last two decades. And in the major Dutch cities, classical White working class neighborhoods changed into Turkish or Moroccan neighborhoods.

Differences increased sharply in levels of education, income and work. Too often, high levels of unemployment and criminality were symptomatic of immigrant neighborhoods. The number of non-Western immigrants grew exponentially. Today, one-third of the youngsters in the big cities are of non-Western origin, especially Moroccan and Turkish. And close to one million Muslims in the Netherlands, a country of 16.5 million in total.

With the benefit of hindsight, Dutch politicians believed too long in our traditional -- what we call -- “pillar structure” for organizing society, in which each group, socialists, Catholic, Protestant, would organize their own schools, their own sports, their own churches, their own political representations -- a model that no longer provided solutions for the problems that people were facing, people on the ground, people in the cities, normal people that you can speak every day at every time.

Geerd Wilders’ film “Fitna” has to be seen against the backdrop of this recent Dutch history. The Netherlands has experienced a period of about six years now of volatile discussions on what goes well

and what goes wrong in multi-cultural societies, and how we could accommodate Islam in our type of constitutional democracies.

It's from this perspective that I would like to share some thoughts with you, for I consider the controversies around freedom of expression and democracy not just a Dutch disease. It is a universal challenge in a time of growing tensions between different cultural and religious groups, combined with the major shifts that I just mentioned.

On the other hand, the horrific attacks on the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, on innocent civilians in 2001, have led many people to believe, in their inner, deepest thoughts, that somehow all Muslims are extremists seeking to destroy us. But on the other hand, in 2006, for many Muslims -- and others -- the image of this country, for instance, was no longer the Statue of Liberty, but a hooded prisoner at Abu Ghraib.

Fear and fear of rejection have become dominant in communities, both in the West and in the Muslim world. Simplification in politics and the media tend to deny, too often, that the horrendous attacks on the World Trade Center were a statement of extremists, and not of all Muslims, as the degrading treatment of Iraqis by some deviant soldiers is often portrayed in other quarters as a determined policy of the West while, in fact, it amounted to a denial of Western values.

The caricatures of Mohammed in the Danish press, and the recent film “Fitna,” are the direct consequence of this way of seeing the world in black and white. What we should really be fearful of is that freedom might fall victim to this controversy.

Everyone must have the opportunity to express themselves freely. And that’s maybe something that has to be said again. You’re opening a museum on this today. That goes to the heart of democracy and is the basis for all other freedoms.

Open debate is the heartbeat of our society. And if only one way of thinking is permitted, the continuous flow of ideas and opinions, the lifeblood of our democracies, will dwindle. It is sometimes strange to realize that you have to put these things again on the agenda.

It will inevitably, if we continue with the problems that we see in our civil liberties, spell the end of our systems of government. How long would we have thought the world was flat if Galileo had not questioned the dominating theory?

Skepticism about the superiority of one’s own values and those of others is an invaluable asset. It is the antidote to fundamentalism.

And the Egyptian author, Alaa al Aswany, known for his bestseller, *The Yacoubian Building*, proves this point by stating, “In Egypt

you can say what you want. But the government also does what it wants. In a democracy, freedom of expression is an instrument of evaluation and change."

Some argue that in the case of the Danish cartoons, and the cut-copy-paste movie by Geerd Wilders -- it's not a movie of very high quality -- it is mostly Muslims who are having to pay the price of freedom. But they are wrong. Because this very freedom enables those who feel offended to speak out and to defend themselves.

I strongly oppose anyone who reduces the debate to a divide between fundamental secularists and those who respect religion, between the Western and the Islamic worlds. It is not Christians and Muslims who are drifting apart, but the tolerant and the intolerant.

I'm convinced that especially the freedoms of speech and press give the rights to all our citizens, be they agnostic or Christian or Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu, to express themselves fully. Freedom of expression and freedom of religion are two sides of the same coin. You cannot separate them. Freedom of speech is, in my view, a precondition for all Muslims to express their rights in Europe, in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

Here lies the key to reciprocity and common purpose.

However, freedom of speech doesn't mean that is a right to insult. There is no sympathy on my side, whatsoever, for a liberal jihad. But there is also no right not to be insulted, not to be hurt, and not to be disrespected.

Democracy doesn't only require wisdom and responsibility in exercising its freedoms, it presupposes respect of the view of the minority. It assures that the voice of the weak is also heard.

But democracy cannot force respect -- only teach it. It cannot force listening, but it presupposes a real dialogue.

Ladies and gentlemen, traditionally, freedom of expression occurs within the constitutional and legal boundaries of a state. Nowadays, opinions travel over the world at the speed of a mouse-click, and are directed towards cross-border groups.

When a movie, like the one we mentioned, is released on You Tube, it can be seen around the world instantly. Reactions and possible repercussions are therefore no longer confined to the state where the production originated.

In this increasingly interconnected world, a whisper at home can lead to a hurricane elsewhere, where the political and social context is completely different.

As one of the founders of the Rushdie defense committee in the Netherlands, Maarten Asscher recently stated, “National states can no longer effectively protect their citizens. The new globalized situation requires an international approach --” -- an approach which, in my view, should also account for the complex and specific domestic realities. And they are very different -- which also avoids the reification of religion.

In Kepel’s’ struggle for the Muslim minds in Europe, there is a completely different social and political context for religion in Europe as compared to that same context in many parts of the Arab world. Yes, there are more similarities. There are linkages. There is internet. But many European Muslims already have their place as educated activist citizens of Europe, and that is positive. But it’s also true that others might choose Islamic rigidity, rejecting integration and embrace separation. That is also a problem. That’s what we should counter: integration is key, but not always easy.

Many citizens ask our government to be much more conscious of the risk of low-skilled immigrants’ -- from especially Muslims countries -- crowding out part of our cities’ and traditional cultural context. Also that voice has to be taken into account and be taken seriously.

Fear of this type of globalization, often by the short-term losers of globalization, should never be neglected. To the contrary, it

requires serious dialogue, but also good investment in inner cities, education and obligation of our immigrants to learn the language and integrating into the new environment.

And it requires the ultimate defense of free speech, without intimidation by Islamic radicals. There, we have to clearly defend our democratic values and to be standing tall. And that is a problem we see in Amsterdam. That there's less of a tolerance, for instance, towards homosexuality, or towards some of the issues we thought to be liberal and tolerant, which now are attacked often by radical groups, and which leads to the discontent in some parts of our society.

Here, I think we have to clearly defend our democratic values and to be standing tall.

In many parts of the Islamic world the social and political context is also fastly changing, leading to conflicts that in some cases become religious in character -- but definitely not always -- between, for instance, fundamentalist and modernizers, Shiites and Shiites, democrats and authoritarians. This is a struggle, actually between tolerance and intolerance in Islam, as we are facing the big challenge of tolerance and intolerance in our Western societies.

We see in the Arab world how the Islam can be an ideological shield for authoritarian regimes, but also the outlet for the

social anger of the poor and the increasing number of youngsters finding no jobs in their closed societies. These groups can also create risk for Europe, Western societies, but that has very little to do with what I also read sometimes in this country, the phantom of so-called “Islamofascism.” That caricature doesn’t help us to find answers.

The Islamic world is too rich and too diverse -- and we can learn too much from it -- to handle these kind of simplifications. In fact, simplification is a mistake. Let me give you an example.

I think that the imminent threat to our homeland security might have led us away from our focus on international democratization and reform in the Arab world -- democracy, not imposed, but fostered from within. I am convinced we have to re-focus on this agenda. It is no accident that 95 percent of the worst economic results over the past 40 years were furnished by non-democratic governments.

Compared with autocracies, democracies are structured to take account of a broader range of interests. The separation of powers also serves as a constant reminder by whom the central government’s powers are limited. Thus, it encourages the expansion and the independence of the private sector and forms of civil society. This, in turn, fosters a climate of innovation and entrepreneurship, the engines of economic growth.

Democracies produce better development indicators on average because they tend to be more adaptable. And in a functioning democracy, corrupt and ineffective leaders are more likely to lose their jobs.

Finally, thanks to their adaptability and quality of steadiness, democracies are better able to respond to economic and humanitarian disasters. For large parts of the population, this can make -- and I say that as a Minister for Development Cooperation -- a difference between life and death.

Today 120 countries have governments resulting from elections in which all adult citizens could vote. We know it: the hierarchies are breaking down, closed systems are opening up -- with all the problems that that entails.

More than ever before, media -- the image of reality and those who have the power over it -- determine the outcomes, policies and state of democracy. Unfortunately the democratization in the world is also at the same time a democratization of violence. There is a danger that democratization will be reduced to formal elections of warlords, separatists and racists, and breeding the ground, also, for terrorism.

The country with the largest Muslim population, Indonesia, has a functioning democracy, with both nationalists and Islamists in

parliament, joining hands against Muslim extremists. Close to 80 percent of Indonesians prefer a secular state over an Islamic one— while in a Taoist, Confucian country like China, even the local version of "You Want to Be a Pop Star" -- I don't know if you have this program here, it's called "Idols," one of our better export products -- was banned, for it stirred democratic sentiments. That was the reality in China.

So, lack of democracy is not necessarily a religious matter. Yet, the democratic caliber of the Arab region silhouettes negatively from the rest of the world -- and we should discuss that.

Out of 18 countries in the region, although modest progress has been made in recent years, only one can be considered a full democracy. The political exclusion and oppression of large groups, combined with the great divide between poor and rich, results in discontent and radicalization. Once mixed with the many conflicts in the region, this produces a political tinderbox, which can be exported also to Europe and other parts of the world.

Democratization of the Arab region and beyond should be -- and remain -- one of our priorities. The Arab Human Development Report 2006, which was written by scholars from the Middle East and sponsored by the United Nations, features some important conclusions in this respect.

The Arab region has fallen from a fifth to a seventh of the OECD per capita income average. Most young people remain un- or underemployed. According to the Report, Arab nations need to urgently embark on rebuilding their societies if their region will not fall further behind.

And they put a few very clear priorities. First, full respect for human rights and political freedoms, as an essential requirement for democracy.

Second, the complete empowerment of Arab women. I think this essentially a point which we should also look at in the cultural wars. The cultural wars often have to do with the position of women, be it in the Arab or in the European world -- taking advantage of all opportunities and building their capacities.

And, of course, three, investment in education.

Governance, gender and education are the keys.

The report gives us further guidance, and warns by saying that further repressive situations in Arab countries will breed conflict and terrorism. All the countries should work to spread democracy, not by military force but by supporting local factors of change.

I would like to dare all democracies, all moderate forces in the West and in the rest of the world, to put our money where our mouth

is. And we could be really successful. Arab citizens believe, according to all surveys, even more strongly than Europeans that democracy is the best form of government.

We can all contribute. This weekend we have a meeting -- that's the reason why I'm here -- of the Development Committee and the meeting of the Bretton Woods Institutions. The UN, democracies, human rights activists, all moderate forces from all parts who believe in sensible solutions.

Unfortunately, this will be too late for the young woman killed in Saudi Arabia last week by her father because she had chatted with a man via the internet website Facebook. And let me stress here again: this is, as far as I am concerned, a matter for a criminal court, not a matter of incompatibility between a certain religion and freedoms and human dignity.

The question is not whether we should or should not assist in promoting democracy and economic reform, but how we should do so.

I am afraid that small beginnings of democracy in the Middle East during 2004 and 2005 -- the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon, the small promise of liberalization in Egypt, some positive changes in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia -- are now overtaken by severe political polarization and, in some cases, by dramatic gains of Islamist radicals. Too many

authoritarian leaders say to citizens, “You want democracy? Look at Iraq. Then you are unsafe.”

So, many in the West have given up on difficult but crucial support for democracy in the Middle East. That would be a strategic mistake with tremendous repercussions. And I see that agenda slowly coming back. “Let’s not talk too much about democracy. It’s dangerous. Radical groups. Let’s go back to the old agenda of stability and authoritarianism.”

That would be very dangerous for the issues that we discuss this morning -- and which I regret also as Minister for Development Cooperation. We have to be bridge builders, end double standards, and strive for intelligent support to democratic developments throughout the Middle East.

I am a believer in interfaith and cultural alliances. But then speak openly. Let’s speak about the role of women. Let’s speak about freedom of speech. Let’s speak about the issues of radicalism. Let’s not be -- have a dialogue for the reasons of having a dialogue, but it should be with the intention to find each other, and not only talk about religion because there are so many factors that get into that, that come into this.

We should never be naive about jihad terrorism -- find appropriate answers without creating a security illusion or underestimating the globalization of terror.

We should never forget --

I think I should end. I'm almost there.

We should never forget to foster democracy, as we should address the root causes, without ever legitimizing terrorism- as a matter of priority.

The Netherlands, as one of the world's leading donors in the field of development cooperation, attaches great importance to substantive democratization -- not the quick fixes -- and participation of all citizens in the process of development. Substantial Dutch support to human rights activists around the world will be strengthened, including to many parts of the Islamic world. And, on top of that, we will establish a new instrument in the fight against radicalization, the fight for democratic developments in societies in the Islamic world.

We will launch a Fund for Pluriformity, Participation and Development. And let me be open about this. There are many of these funds, and normally they deal with certain groups in the capital of some of the states you would like to work with. They often don't work. We really

have to understand what's happening, the actors, in the country itself, the leadership, the Islamic leadership.

The fund aims at the goals I mentioned by enhancing the ability of civil powers that advocate home-grown reforms aimed at pluriformity -- and there is a lot of pluriformity in the Islamic world.

Democratization should not be about imposing Western copies. Principles of democracy are universal, but the way a country fleshes it out is a local matter. That's not cultural relativism -- I'm a big opponent of that -- but a simple conclusion that democracy should, as the word means, be carried by the people it represents. It's not a matter of arrogance.

We will support projects and activists that structurally contribute to decision-making processes, and include groups that are otherwise limited in their freedoms.

I advocate an active tolerance, where you pair freedom with critique, where the legal acceptance of a great degree of freedom in how people live their lives doesn't necessarily imply the moral acceptance of that way of life. Exactly because we don't want to forbid certain opinions and behaviors, we should utilize the power of dialogue, debate, critique and confrontation to defend our core values and to challenge others. And

that is sometimes not easy. And, as I said, there's no right to insult somebody else, but there is also no right not to be insulted.

It is important to reach out to the many Muslims in the world that want a job, a better life and a better government. And, let me stress once more, freedom of speech, as a recent study has shown, is a favorite item in the Muslim world. And that is not always going to be easy. I know many groups in this area are influenced by extremist and anti-Western ideologies. In many ways they are inspired by hatred. Here is, in my view, no place for complacency or naivety, but we have to try, and we have to be prepared for very serious dilemmas. It doesn't make any sense not to speak.

Let's start by undertaking a serious dialogue within our societies and with the moderate Muslims to start in the Arab World. Not just with governments, but also with moderate groups that, in fact, are gaining popularity among the population in the Arab world. A coalition of reason.

I think this is well possible. Since the end of the '90s, many Islamic parties have chosen a new course, more aimed at democratization and denouncing violence. Under the Islamic rhetoric, democratic values are unveiling, like representation and transparency.

Now is the time to seek the similarities rather than the differences. In difficult times this is a marriage of hope.

But it is a challenge as much to the Arab world and the Muslim community at large as it is to ourselves.

The images imprinted in our heads are great enemies of a true dialogue. The news cycle feeds us 24/7 with images of fear -- fear for each other, fear for the other.

More and more often the persistent fallacy is being propagated that Islam cannot be reconciled with democratic values. Many tend to pass over the idea of the Islam not being a monolithic bloc.

We have to brace ourselves against those very bad images. Let's stop thinking as "the West against the rest," and start bridging the divide.

If the issue of the Wilders movie makes one thing clear, it is that Europeans, Americans and Arabs, Christians and Muslims, are more dependent on each other than ever.

The current developments therefore compel us to increase, not decrease, our commitment to dialogue with each other. Let us use this situation as an opportunity for the West, the Islamic world to improve and build on our relationships.

Apologies are not called for. The West must stand by its principles. Freedom of expression, freedom of religion, respect for each other's beliefs do not create differences, but bridge them. That is the real lesson from "Fitna." The world is truly one, and only we can make that happen.

Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. BENJAMIN: Well, thank you very much, Minister Koenders for a remarkably rich and challenging set of remarks. I fear that there's far more to discuss in there than we will possibly have time to.

But to begin that process, it's my pleasure to welcome to the podium Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed. He is no stranger to those who have been discussing the issues that you touched on, or the broader issues regarding Islam and the presence of large Muslim population in the West -- and has been doing so for quite a number of years.

He is currently the National Director of the Office for Interfaith and Community Alliances for the Islamic Society of North America. In fact, as President of the Muslim Student Association in the U.S.A. and Canada, he played a critical role in transforming that group into the Islamic Society of North America.

He's also served as Secretary General of the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations.

Dr. Syeed is particularly well suited to address this set of issues because his academic career, his academic credentials, are in socio-linguistics, which is a very apposite field for what we are discussing. And he received that Ph.D. from Indiana University.

Again, it's my pleasure to welcome Dr. Syeed to the podium.

(Applause)

DR. SYEED: What a delight, and what a pride to hear this very dynamic globe-trotter, who has been to almost all continents -- and major conflict areas, as well.

So my presence here is just to tell you that we don't boycott Dutch scholars, leaders, politicians. So that's why I'm standing here.

So, when this thing happened, you must have seen the statement that our organization put through. It was to appeal Muslims to take this opportunity to spend time to read more of Koran, to get more involved in the spiritual aspect, and to reinforce our commitment of our living in a pluralist democracy.

I was just now reminded -- because we have one representative here from the independent sector. After 9/11 they had

arranged a conference, their annual conference, and they had invited me. That was, you can imagine -- it was immediately after 9/11.

So I had said that the terrorists, when they destroyed the tallest towers of America, they thought that it was these towers that represented the greatness of America. Little did they realize that America stands tall because it has been able to build a society that takes pride in its diversity.

So that was later used by them for their New Year greetings, and that -- that's exactly what our experience in America is, as Muslims of America.

As you might have noticed, we started as Muslim Students Association of U.S. and Canada in '60s and '70s, then we transformed it into Islamic Society of North America. So today, according to different counts, we may have 6 to 10 million Muslims in America.

So our organization had the good luck of determining the vision, how it will look like, to create an existence in a pluralist democracy, where Muslims would take pride in their own Islamic identity and be part of the mainstream.

So this has been a struggle. We have, today, about 300 to 400 Islamic centers that are affiliated with us. So it is through the

sermons, through the magazine that we publish, Islamic Horizons, which is read about a quarter-million Muslims and people of other faiths.

It is through our conferences and conventions, where we have been able to go through a transformative experience in this country. We get, for our annual convention we get about 20,000 to 30,000 people. This is one of the largest religious conventions in America. And this huge gathering, we have a structured program where you have 200 to 300 speakers. A good number of them are people of other faiths, giving their workshops, panel discussions, lectures, inter-faith dialogues.

Your paper would have been very appropriate for our annual convention, which takes place every year, during the Labor Day weekend.

So it's not the Muslim community in North America that we can compare with Muslims in Europe. The appropriate comparison for America -- the way American democracy has matured over centuries -- the different issues and the different challenges that we have had in America was exactly, as you said, it's not black and white, but for us it was black and white.

The democracy gave rights to Whites and deprived the Blacks.

So it's amazing to see have we have gone through that transformation -- both in terms of legal terms, social terms, at every level --

how, ultimately, the huge Black population in America was integrated, or is on its way to integration.

What kind of frustrations, what kind of struggle, what kind of wars, what kind of debates -- right from the Civil War to Civil Rights movement -- and how, today, within these 30, 40 years, how we have witnessed those things transform.

I was last week with a Congressional pilgrimage to Mississippi. We went to those different places, like Jackson, Mississippi, Philadelphia, Mississippi. So these cities, which are associated with some of the horrible events that took place before, during the Civil Rights movement, where Medgar Evers was assassinated, where several other -- the Civil Rights riders, Civil Rights activists were murdered.

But the way, ultimately, the reconciliation has taken a direction in a pluralist democracy is quite amazing. We certainly get hurt when we have these cartoons, and when we have these films and so on, but then, in a democratic environment, you cannot -- we understand that fully -- that you cannot control, you cannot deprive people of their rights to do those things.

But how, in America, ultimately, things have changed. As a socio-linguist, I have noticed on that level how the language itself has changed.

We were in Philadelphia, where the church was burned. I'm talking about Philadelphia, Mississippi -- there are several Philadelphias here -- where a synagogue was bombed. So in the same city, after the things were changed, when the Blacks and Whites sit together, how do they talk? How has the language changed? How has that "N" word, negro, how it had -- it was never declared illegal in America, but no one uses that word now.

It was amazing to see, from a linguistic point of view, how people now know which word to use and which word not to use. Because they know that if they use that word, how it would insult others, and therefore they have to be cautious, conscious of that fact.

And we looked in different cities in Mississippi, how these peace and reconciliation committees get together and try to be comfortable with each other. And over the last few decades they have been able to build that confidence. But in order to build that confidence, they have made sure, "What should we do? How do -- " -- initial discussions are very interesting. "Should we call 'African-American' -- should we call them 'African-Americans?' Should we call them 'Afro-Americans?' Should we call them 'Blacks?'"

So in a relaxed way, once there is that commitment that we have to create that harmony, we have to create that understanding, so

they have been able to sort out those issues. And here in North Virginia, only in the last elections, you remember what happened when one of the politicians, who was about to win the race, so he used that wrong word "Macaca," and then the whole thing was destroyed.

So that means within pluralist democracy it is possible we can evolve a language, we can create an understanding, and we can create a common ground. But definitely there has to be a commitment to do that.

So there are several examples here that we can quote how we have been able -- we as Muslims had a tremendous difficulty during '60s and '70s, because African-Americans, who -- majority of them who had been brought to this country as slaves, and brought from the Muslim region, so therefore they had roots in Islam. And in the middle, in 1930s and '40s, a powerful movement was born out of the resentment that they had experienced in this country, and that movement was called "Nation of Islam."

And Nation of Islam had totally taken a very extremist Afro-centric position, that Blacks are chosen people, and Whites are devil. The language -- you should read some of the writings of Honorable Elijah Muhammad. And then Islam was used as a vehicle of expression of this whole resentment.

So, for us, for the mainstream Muslims, it was a problem. How do we deal with this? On the one hand, we couldn't recognize it as Islam, because it was totally a deviation. It was totally an affront to the universal Islam which is beyond color, race and ethnicity. It was an affront to Islam, which recognizes Judaism, Christianity as Abrahamic sisters, as a continuation for Islam as the final religion. So they were identifying Christianity and Judaism.

So, for us, the issue was, we could recognize it on the one hand, that whatever they are saying, the way they are expressing Islam, is basically a product of the resentment and the anger and the injustices that they have gone through for centuries. So on the one hand we have to tolerate it, but we have to engage ourselves with them.

And the result is we were able to transform that organization. Large number of major -- these heroes of that organization, many of you know, Malcolm X, that was marvelous for us when, through his interaction with us, his eyes were opened, he went to Haj, and for the first time he recognized that the -- it's not the color that makes it unjust, it is not the -- it is the history, it's the particular context. And then he changed -- even though he could not live that long.

But our greatest success was through our interaction with the sons of Elijah Muhammad, who was the founder of Nation of Islam,

when his eldest son -- when his son W.D. Muhammad, he came in contact with us. And after the death of his father in '75, he took over Nation of Islam and changed its ideology 180 degrees.

So what I'm trying to say, that through our experience in America, we have seen that even though the name of Islam itself may be hijacked or misrepresented, but in an environment of dialogue, it is possible to help people to get, to understand what the requirements and the expectations on the mainstream level are.

And then we have been able to recognize the interpretation of Islam, and connect ourselves with the whole history of authenticity and the whole -- and the scriptures of Islam, from the Koran to Hadiz, and interpretations, and the jihad itself, where our members feel that they are moving in an authentic direction.

Today, when we have a woman as the president of the Islamic Society of North America, so it's not news. Because over the decades we have been able to prepare our people for that.

So, several hundred of our Islamic centers, which are led by women, where women are providing leadership and are members of the executive committees, and even presidents, this is something unimaginable in many parts of the Muslim world.

So, in that sense, the pluralist democracy, freedom of expression, it has challenged us, provided us wonderful opportunities of reinforcing those interpretations of Islam which were already there, but over centuries of colonialism, over centuries of neo-colonialism, were not sufficiently encouraged and sufficiently reinforced. So that has provided a wonderful opportunity in that sense.

So it's not -- I mean, you referred about my -- when we succeeded in creating this Muslim Students Association of U.S. and Canada. This was our first experience of that kind of movement in America.

So we created an international, Federation of International Islamic Students Organizations. So it's in that capacity I went to Central Asia, to Europe and so on.

So in the '60s and '70s, we wanted to create a similar kind of experiment in those countries. But it was difficult -- both sides. That the Muslims who were coming to those countries did not have the same background. They were not the products of the brain-drain, that they were not highly educated, and so on. But at the same time, the host societies had not reached a level where they could have, with respect, with appreciation, helped them to integrate in their mainstreams.

So on every level there is such a contrast. The Muslim community in America, coming from different Muslim countries, had a model of creating a Muslim melting pot within the American mainstream. The problem was that in Europe, that could not happen.

So there are these different communities are intact. Their linguistic, political and other affiliations are even reinforced in certain ways.

So this will be my response as an American Muslim. And we will have more, because people may be actually interested to talk to you and have more questions and more explanations.

Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. BENJAMIN: Well, thank you very much, Dr. Syeed, for a very, very thoughtful response to the speech.

In a moment I'd like to open up the floor to questions, but first I'd like to make a few comments of my own.

First of all, Minister Koenders, I want to applaud you for taking on genuinely tough issues. And I think that that's important in its own right, but also important as a precedent. Because, quite frankly, at the political level, we're not seeing enough of that in most countries. And these are some of the really tough issues that we're facing today. And I can't overemphasize the need to engage on them.

I found an enormous amount to agree on with you, especially your view of the need to defend and stand by the freedom of speech while at the same time insisting that there is no right or requirement to insult I think is a vital one, and I think ought to be foremost in the thoughts of everyone these days, whether they are politicians, political leaders forced to deal with these issues, or newspaper editors, cartoonists, what have you.

You know, the freedom of speech, particularly in the United States, I think we probably have as strong a tradition as anywhere, but you don't have the right to scream fire in a movie theater. And that is an important thing to keep in mind. We live in a period when there are enormously inflamed sensibilities, a great deal of concern, and I think that basic prudence is a virtue that often goes overlooked.

I applaud -- strongly applaud -- your call for a revitalized democratization effort. My own feeling is that President Bush got it exactly right in his famous speech at the National Endowment for Democracy when he said that the United States and its partners had made an error in giving many countries, particularly in the Arab world, a pass on democratization.

At the same time, I feel that our own freedom agenda, you know, was woefully misguided in the way that it was applied, and

underestimated the difficulties of implementation and the strong need for consistency. That is to say, if you force elections on people, or you push for them very hard and then get them, you shouldn't turn around and then decide that the results don't favor your other agendas and therefore should either be ignored or undermined in any way. It is a great paradox. But it's also something that we need to be clear about.

And over the long term, I share the implicit view in your speech that the authoritarian status quo is unsustainable, and fundamentally creates a pressure cooker in a lot of these societies. And anyone who has read the kinds of stories that are increasingly appearing the press about unemployment -- there was one in the New York Times recently on un- and under-employment in Egypt -- has to have an acute sense of the need for the kind of economic liberalization that you get, mostly, when you have democratic liberalization. And this is a very important point.

And, frankly, this has been an enduring problem in the Middle East. If you go back, you know, and look at some of the classic works on radical Islam, whether by Giles Kepel or Emmanuel Sivan, you'll see that one of the problems is an awful lot of people who have university degrees, who thought that they were entitled to exercise their human potential, or fulfill their human potential and use the knowledge they have,

and wound up either driving taxis or acting as underpaid tutors, living at home and being unable to get on with those things that we consider to be the necessities, or the natural course of life, such as moving out of your parents' house, getting married, having a family, so on and so forth.

Having said that, I guess what I would like to do is just underscore how difficult some of these issues are to deal with, and how difficult it will be for us -- in my view -- to make progress on them. Because while the principles that you enunciated I think are quite right, some of the realities are quite intractable.

Philosophers talk about the problem of "incommensurability" -- you have one set of values, I have another, and it's very hard to reconcile them.

This is something that we're very familiar with in our own country from the debate on abortion, in which, if someone feels that there is an absolute religious imperative to prevent abortion they feel called upon to ack in a certain way. And, frankly, within their system of values, there is a consistency to that. And for those who believe, as some Muslims do, for example, that there is an absolute requirement to oppose blasphemy, there is going to be an absolute requirement to oppose blasphemy.

And we are not going to be able to wish away those differences from one day to the next. And we are in a period -- I'm not sure there's ever been a different period, but I was going to say we're in a period in which Yeats' famous formulation that, you know, the best lack all conviction and the worst are filled with passionate intensity, will continue to be the case. And that's going to cause significant challenges in our effort to deal with these very real conflicts.

I think that a recognition -- and this is really the last thing I want to say -- a recognition of just how difficult merging the different worlds that have now been linked by globalized communications, by dealing with their different sensitivities, it's going to be quite a challenge.

And just to give one more example to perhaps illustrate how difficult this is going to be, with an example from history -- I fully agree with you about the role of women in developing societies. I don't think anyone who has looked at the literature could feel otherwise.

If you go back and look at the thoughts of the al- Jihad group that was responsible for the murder of Anwar Sadat, it's often thought that they acted the way they did because of their opposition to the peace process in the Middle East. If you read what they wrote, they were at least as upset about the implementation of a new divorce law in Egypt, which would allow women rights over the disposition of children in divorces.

And so, while I'm not in any way suggesting that we delay or mitigate this agenda, or shall we say "de-prioritize" the issue of the role of women in developing societies, we do need to proceed sensitively, and understanding that it is going to take a lot of time, and there's going to be some broken crockery along the way. And we need to be careful to avoid confronting one brand of fundamentalism with another. And, you know, "enlightenment fundamentalism" is a kind of dangerous thing in its own way.

So, with that, let me open up the floor to questions. We have about 25 minutes.

And right back there.

Please introduce yourself, and ensure that at the end of your remarks there is a question mark.

MR. HORNER: Mr. Koenders, thank you for speaking to us today. My name is Thomas Horner. I'm a Dutch student at Johns Hopkins/SAIS.

I would like to ask you whether you believe that a domestic debate in the Netherlands, and the rest of Europe, whether they have affected Europe's ability to implement an effective foreign and military policy in the Islamic world.

I would be curious to hear, for instance, whether Dutch Islamophobia in the society has affected your government's stance towards Hamas, or whether it has affected popular support for the mission in Afghanistan?

MINISTER KOENDERS: That was a question-mark. No, I don't think so, actually. There are lots of discussions in Dutch society, obviously, about politics towards the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The fact that we have a large contingent of troops in one of the more volatile areas of Afghanistan.

And I think in some of our inner-cities, especially among Muslim groups, this is hotly debated, and correctly so.

So far, I haven't seen, in our official positions and also in our policies, any consequence in terms of a different policy being the fact that we would have, let's say, a million Muslims in the Netherlands would change our positions for that reason, on the policies in the Middle East.

To the contrary, we are seen by many -- rightly or wrongly so -- as strong supporters of Israel, but also of a peaceful solution to the problems.

On Afghanistan, I think there is also there, again, an interesting view of what's very much appreciated in your comments, the freedom of expression and debate shows you immediately that there's

also a divergence of views in the Muslim community. That's the essence of it.

I really believe that the freedom of expression -- that's why I think it is, it is an important principle. It's not just a principle to talk about in vague terms, but in essence gives many groups in our societies a way to express themselves. And you see immediately that, for instance, in the area of policies towards the Middle East or the war on terror, there are also diversified views within the Moslem communities in the Netherlands.

I would say, in general they are a bit more critical, obviously, and they would identify, many of them, more with the Palestinians and with the double standards of the policies of the West in the Middle East, with the danger of the militarization of imposing democracy, and so and so forth.

But that's a debate which is being fought in our societies as a whole, and it's not specific, I think -- at least not dominating the debate.

So, in the final analysis, I think the answer would be no. I'm not sure that it will always remain like that.

MR. BENJAMIN: Sir? Yep. Right there.

MR. GALLAGHER: Mr. Koenders, I'm relatively optimistic about the outcome in your country, where there is a painful reexamination

taking place about how to absorb, you know, people who have arrived in the last two or three generations --

MINISTER KOENDERS: Yes.

MR. GALLAGHER: -- with different values. I'm more optimistic about the Netherlands than my own country, because I think you have a robust sense of identity. My question -- that we, unfortunately, have lost in Britain. Incidentally, I'm Tom Gallagher, National Endowment for Democracy.

My question is this. What advice would you give to Americans who perhaps are on the brink of momentous political change here, on what lessons to take, and what lessons to disregard from Europe, where you have had an emphasis on multiculturalism, promoted by the EU, promoted by most member states with large ethno-religious minorities. And perhaps the outcome has been, instead of a genuine coming together, mutual tolerance, you've had the emergence of parallel communities that don't talk to one another. You've had monoculturalism emerging through multiculturalism.

So what -- you know, what advice would you give to Americans about what not to learn and adapt from the European experience?

MINISTER KOENDERS: Well, to be very frank with you, and give you a very direct answer, I don't think we have a lot to teach to America in this area. I think we are faced with quite a few problems, about which I'm not necessarily pessimistic.

I agree with you. I said in my speech that the issues which are coming to the fore at the moment in the Netherlands are, in my view, not specific to my society or to our society. It is, for the reasons I mentioned, a part of an issue in which pretty intensive migration flows in the context of -- and I think you mentioned that, as well -- a smaller Muslim diaspora that you would find here, with many people, especially, from the countryside in Morocco and Turkey, with very conservative views inside the complex differing views that exist in the Muslim world.

So you see immediately a pretty strong tension between the liberal attitudes that Holland is known for -- correctly or not, I'll leave that in the middle -- and the very traditional views that especially, even within Muslim society, that came together in a very small period of time, in our cities. And I agree with what you have been saying, it is a very complex issue. We're not going to solve that easily.

I'm not pessimistic, because I see many, many, many of our Muslim citizens integrating very well. They're activist citizens.

I found it very interesting that the movie “Fitna” has led to very calm reactions in our society. People almost get a little bit used to it, that this is part of the debate.

Again, that’s what you said: the freedom of expression gives the opportunity to adapt and integrate -- of course, with your own identity.

I am much more critical over our own past in multiculturalism because, as I said, multiculturalism in itself doesn’t say much. It could be indifference. If it’s indifference, it’s not good.

I believe that a certain amount of integration in a society is possible. It doesn’t mean everybody has to -- that’s not “assimilation.” Assimilation is completely different: that you have one culture, everybody has to abide by it. If they don’t, we kick them out. Integration is basically living together.

And I think that the issue of multiculturalism as we have phrased it before was maybe slightly naive, as if everybody could easily live together, and there’s really no problem. You accept each other, and you respect -- no.

The issue is a real debate. And through the movements of the last couple of years, I think we are getting to this debate. The interesting part, I found after the movie came out, that among the vast array of views in the Muslim community in the Netherlands, everybody

said, “We’ve seen the movie. We understand we have to talk, to debate. Let’s take this opportunity.”

The person who made the movie actually said, “For me, the problem are not the Muslims, it’s the Koran.” I’m not saying that is necessarily something that I would support. But at least he was, in effect, blaming more our government, that we had made statements on it, than the Muslim community. Also, that creates an opportunity to maneuver.

It’s going to be very difficult. But I think it is important to do so.

And therefore, I would not immediately say that I have a lot to teach to America. I find very much that we are all living with the same need to define our identities. Look at Huntington’s book, you have a big debate here in America on this, there’s different views on it, and so on and so forth.

But I think some things are the same. The definition of what you call “mono” or “multiculturalism,” the issues of how the public debate is being formed.

I thought it was interesting how you depicted the emancipation of the Muslim community in the U.S. as one that was related at a certain point to the fight for the emancipation of Blacks in America. And there was a linkage at the moment which led to the next phase, in

which freedom of expression and a debate on the Islam in American became a key point.

In short, my answer would be I'm a bit modest in giving advice to America on this.

MR. BENJAMIN: This issue of identity is especially a fraught one right now, particularly in Europe where, first of all, there are now multiple identities available to everyone. You can be Dutch, you can be from a particular city in Holland. You can be "European."

Muslims have another set of identities in addition to available with them. And then you have, in an era of globalization, all kinds of questions about identity. And I'm thinking of this renowned speech that was given -- and you may not want to comment on it -- by a Dutch princess on what does it mean to be Dutch?

So one of the problems in sort of negotiating these issues is that so much is up for grabs. In some ways it's easier to integrate people when you have agreed upon set of characteristic— to be "Dutch," to be "American," to be "French." And we know, in France, there's a, I think, a new ministry for national identity, practically.

MINISTER KOENDERS: Yes. I think it's finding -- and, you're right. This is, in practice, very difficult. I mean, what you're saying to each other, we are building together a common future -- which is very

difficult because we come from different worlds. And we are also, at the same time, living in the same world, namely, in this case, in the Netherlands, or in Washington, D.C., or elsewhere -- but not necessarily in similar positions.

I think what w probably can learn from America is that the diversity that you have known in your migration flows to this country, that it is also a generational issue. I mean, it costs a few generations for people to get integrated in a society. Almost in all migration, and the clashes that go with that, with the host community -- and it's all different in different countries. There's different numbers and figures and where you come from. But it's always a matter, also -- it is a bit cliche to say -- but it's also a matter of time.

MR. BENJAMIN: Very much.

MINISTER KOENDERS: And this timing now is quite key for us. Because now these issues come together in a time where there are larger questions about our own identity. That's why what's happening in the host and the home community is interrelated. It is true that the Dutch are -- like the Americans, I think, like the Egyptians, like everybody is -- looking, what is our place in the world?

Do we have an identity at the moment that everything is in flux? Globalization, markets, you name it. We don't have any control.

There's the politics of fear. Where do we stand? Because if we are fearful, then we want to assure that we are belonging to a group that can defend us. That's a worldwide phenomenon. It's the struggle these days that we are faced with.

And it seems to me that it is true that if you look to integration, it obviously is a big responsibility for both sides. I think we also should say to our Muslims -- I'm very open to that -- yes, you have to integrate. Yes, you have to learn the language. Yes, we have certain customs in this country. And if you live here, you have to abide by it -- not in the same of assimilation or lack of respect.

But it is -- I mean, let's not be naive on that. There are a few groups in my society, as there are here, mostly on the bottom side of the economic ladder, who see competition. And if they are insecure, competition leads to stigma. That is part of the populistic attraction from some of the politicians we have in our country

So it's a combination of dialogue which is active, active tolerance, not just say, "Yes, we like to speak to each other because it's a good idea, and we both are nice people." No, let's see where the differences are. That's not -- I mean, I'm for a clear and open debate.

But let's also not forget that it's about education, it's about inner cities, it's about emancipation, it's about education. It's a generational problem. It's not one or the other.

MR. BENJAMIN: The first hand I saw up, back there.

MS. MADDOX: Hello. I'm Gail Maddox, from the Naval Academy.

And my comment or question dovetails, actually, to Dan Benjamin's, and that is on the whole question of identity and, in particular, the EU.

Usually, at some point in a talk by a European, we hear the European Union mentioned. And this talk, of course, did not. And I have the sense when I'm looking at this debate over immigration, and over roles within the various societies, that it's very much nationally divided. You hear the British view, you hear the Dutch view.

And I'd like to know -- the Spanish -- is there a role for the EU in this whole debate and discussion? And is there sort of a "European identity" that could cut across some of these, and some way in which this could be a helpful element in it?

MINISTER KOENDERS: So, it's for me, the question?

MR. BENJAMIN: I think that's for you.

(Laughter)

MINISTER KOENDERS: I thought it was for you.

MR. BENJAMIN: I'm not going to speak for the EU.

MINISTER KOENDERS: I try to get out of this one.

Yes, there is a role for the European Union, but this is rather limited.

It is true that you hear a Dutch view, you hear a Spanish view, you hear an Italian view, maybe. I would say two things about that.

One, I think the problems that I've tried to depict, and which are not that new, but which you've read everywhere in the press, and this happens in Europe, are not specific to my country. We have seen these migration patters related especially to influx from the Muslim world in different forms, and with different characteristics, all over Europe. So that debate is everywhere.

And in some countries, the debate is a bit different than in others, related to your national particularisms. In some countries there is a stronger national identity that still remains. In other countries it has already been -- it is already in flux.

If it's very much in flux, it's also sometimes very difficult for migrants that come to those countries to ask the question -- as you said—"Where do I actually integrate in?" "I mean, they ask us to integrate all the time? In what, actually?"

So it's the home and the host community, so to speak, in this case. Or let's say the home -- the host state and the migrants who have exactly similar questions. They both are unclear about their own future.

Therefore, I think politics has a great responsibility. And it's not an easy one. Because it's a combined thing of organizing debate, about structural issues, et cetera.

I don't think the European Union can replace that -- even because, I think, a lot of problems that people have with their national identity is they have seen that some of the identity goes through a bureaucracy in Brussels where they don't identify with.

It doesn't mean, on the other hand, to make it even more complex, that I don't think there is a certain "European" sense developing of how to deal with these issues. Maybe I'm too optimistic, but I think that will happen.

There's another role in the European Union which is much more down to earth. I think we need much more of a common (inaudible) policy, a common migration policy, a policy on what we deal with, the people who are going to be in old age when we have many young people, so others will come. What do we do with it? What does it mean for these kind of questions?

And so I think there is, from that point of view, a strong role for the European Union. But it's not going to solve the basic issues here.

Actually, I think we should go even lower than the nation-state. Because it's not only one of national identity. I mean, I see even cities in my own country and in some cities it's very different than in others. You really have to go down to the level of where people live, how they set up their businesses, what their futures are, what are they talking about? What do they think about religion? There is a difference between the Turkish minority and the Moroccan minority. And the Moroccan minorities are different if they come from the countryside or not.

If you don't go into these very specific issues and you have only, let's say, the level of discussion that I am now guilty of, then it's not going to happen.

So I would rather go a level lower, also, and only thinking at a level higher.

MR. BENJAMIN: This gentleman's been waiting patiently.

MR. VON SCHIRACH: Thank you, my name is Paolo von Schirach, Schirach Report.

Just one comment and a question -- especially to you, Dr. Syeed.

You had indicated in your earlier remarks about the strength of the United States that was revealed after 9/11 there was in its diversity. I think you made that comment.

I would add that the strength is really in liberal democratic institutions which are predicated on the sovereignty of --

(Interruption)

DR. SYEED: When, say, for example, in Springfield, Illinois, there are 100 Muslim families, and they want to have an Islamic center, I have already made a constitution for them. I want them to establish an Islamic Society of Springfield, Illinois, affiliated with the national organization.

So the constitution tells them that men and women of that community will have equal membership in the organization. They will be raising funds from those who believe in that. And then they build Islamic center. And that in that Islamic center, they will appoint someone -- president and other members of the executive committee -- they will abide by these principles. And they will appoint an imam who will be giving sermons on these bases.

So since women as well as men are involved, it's impossible to have someone coming from Saudi Arabia and telling them that your

women cannot attend our prayer here. Because the whole thing -- I have been able to create that structure.

We visit them, they attend our conferences. The imam attends our training program. It is impossible for them, for someone to stand up and say that women have to go to another room, or they cannot come here in this discussion.

So what I'm saying is that we have shown, here in this country, it is possible, authentically, to create an Islam presence which has all those dimensions, and fits in a wider debate that's going on in America.

So that was my answer. I cannot quote all that's going on.

It's true that this internet websites, hundreds of thousands of them -- so when these people sit and look, because they have to raise their children also, who should be doing all that, the possibilities that America provides to their children. So their desire is that their children should become the highest in America.

So their Sunday school is also doing the same thing. So the result is that when they go to the websites, the make a selective -- when they are on these, what do you call those? -- e-mail lists, they make a selection which e-mail list they should subscribe to.

So there are hundreds of them. I mean, if you are in Washington, D.C., you can contact me. I can take you to one of the Islamic centers, meet with our imam, and see how it is going on.

It's taken a lot of effort. It's not that easy. People have been -- there have been certain quarters who have dumped with so much of literature here in this country, and we had to take it out, and we had to dump -- we had to see that it does not circulate within our centers. And the result is, today our centers, our leaders, our youth leaders -- and women -- they are fully immunized towards these things.

So this is our contribution.

MR. BENJAMIN: Did you want to add anything?

MINISTER KOENDERS: Maybe shortly -- crystal ball gazing is always very dangerous in these kind of issues. But let me assure you that I have no naivete on the risks of political, radical fundamentalist Islam. Maybe these words are actually not the right ones I should use, because there's a lot of confusion what is "fundamentalist," what is "political Islam."

But, really, there is, of course -- I mean, we all know, I think, two things at the moment. Terror is not only something that comes from Islam. We see a lot of radicalism around the world, look at Hindu radicalism, et cetera. But it's also true, at the same time, a lot of the terror we see is being inspired by those who misuse Islam for these kind of acts

of terror. That is also a reality. If it becomes bigger or not -- I would be very cautious about it.

I am very struck by some of the extremist views that some of our people have in the Netherlands. And that's a risk.

Does it mean we cannot have this debate, or we are naive if we should have this debate? No, I don't think so. I have said in my speech that I abhor analyses that are being made as if this tendency is similar to something that is comparable to fascism, as if this is a large, organized group in which is a common philosophy of having the caliphate in Europe and so on and so forth -- not only because it is untrue, it's also unwise. It simply is not -- you cannot do anything with it.

So I have no naivete. But I think, at the same time, that the facts are -- as you said -- that these things can be influenced from all sides. And that's why the principle of freedom of expression, of debate, of not putting everybody in the same corner, is crucial.

I was amazed. You said, "Yes, there's a risk." I mean, in an interview I saw on Dutch television, there was a gentleman from the U.S., I think from Georgia. And they said, "What do you think about Mr. Obama?" Because he's, you know -- and he said, "Well, Mr. Obama has always -- he's being very positive of Muslims." He says, "Obama, Osama -- it's all

the same thing to me." And that's also a tendency. We can put everybody in the corner.

I should not have any naivete, but what strikes me more is the danger of obsession. I find an enormous obsession with this issue in a way which is not productive, which is not based on facts, or the complexity of Islam. And it is only reifying the issue of religion, as if we're only talking about religious issues.

I mean, even in Afghanistan, where I've been a lot, or in Pakistan, there is really a difference there -- even if we know it as extremism. And that has to do with our foreign policy, also -- your foreign policy.

It has been amazing how long anti-Americanism and hatred could be fueled in Pakistan because of support for Mr. Musharraf. When he did his grab for power, I stopped immediately the development cooperation. Now, he's not going to be very -- not that that's created a resolution in Pakistan, we don't give that money. But it is because also in Pakistan the large majority of people are very moderate Muslims. But exactly creating the wrong fight against terror, we've invited very negative consequences, even with consequences for our homeland security.

MR. BENJAMIN: We are already past time, and here at Brookings we're fanatically punctual.

But before we stop, one person who must be heard from -- both because she -- or because she was Ambassador to the Netherlands, because she's a Brookings scholar, and a friend of the Minister -- Ambassador Schneider.

MINISTER KOENDERS: I haven't seen her here.

MR. BENJAMIN: Yes.

MINISTER KOENDERS: Ohhh. Sitting so modestly in the back.

One of your great ambassadors in the Netherlands. We still miss you.

AMBASSADOR SCHNEIDER: Well, it's great to see you. I'm so glad to see you in this position.

And so now, as a sign of friendship, I'm going to ask you a difficult question.

MR. BENJAMIN: Great -- but you have to answer briefly.

AMBASSADOR SCHNEIDER: And, Paolo, just to you, stop on your way out, down below. Buy a copy of the book What Islam Thinks, the landmark study by Gallup, which shows that there is not, in fact, widespread support for suicide bombers among Muslim populations at all -- no more so than among non-Muslim populations.

So buy the book on your way out. I see they're having an event downstairs. And that will change some of those ideas.

So, here, I have two questions for you, Bert.

The first on is: what do you see for the economic mobility of the Muslim populations in the Netherlands. And there, I will make a comparison with what has happened -- maybe it's changed since 2001, but what I still saw happening in 2001 with the female population in the Netherlands, of anybody. Which is that you get right into government, high positions in government, all over the government. And there's been a huge increase of Muslims in the government from the time I was there, already in the last seven years.

But what still hasn't happened with women -- and I wonder if it would be the same with the Muslim population -- is a real economic mobility, not just having your own store on the corner but, you know, getting up into the management ranks of the major companies.

So that's one question, economic mobility.

The other one is: when you talk about democratization -- I am working on cultural projects in the Middle East Policy Center at Brookings, and what I hear all the time -- we just heard with Rhee, my assistant, we just heard this morning from another person that in the Muslim world they are flooded with literature, religious literature, you

know, fundamentalist literature, on the web, in the bookshelves, in the universities, and very little else, including not just Western literature but their own literature, their own writers who are writing in a more moderate way, in a more critical way.

And the same with films. They can't access it.

So I'm wondering, as a Development Cooperation perspective, do you have any plans -- we don't do very much of this, so I'm hoping somebody else will -- to get more literature and films out there, produced within the Muslim world that they don't even have access to?

MINISTER KOENDERS: Well, the first question is a very key one, and I'm very glad you ask it. Because we spoke very much at the level of cultural exchange and good debate and, you know, better dialogue and so on -- respect when we talk to each other, how open are you?

I remain to say that it is not only religion. It has to do with economic opportunities for our migrants. And I see still in my country too much discrimination against Muslims in the higher positions in business.

At the same time, I see also some of them being extremely successful, and some companies supporting this.

And that's the way to go, I think, it seems to me.

We also see some of the more established ones going back to their own countries because they don't find a job they would like to

have. And my feeling is that if we're talking about two or three generations in which people can become active citizens in the Netherlands, this is the key area: work, employment, but also in the higher echelons.

And there is also a difference with the U.S. We have, of course, a welfare state system, which has positive and negative sides for this issue. Most of our workers came in the '70s and '80s, as workers in our industry when we had a shortage of labor. The next waves of immigration had to do much more with marriages, with families and so on and so forth -- of which many also came dependent on social security. They had the right to get it, but it's not always the most activist model. That's why we are activating that. And I think that could also help bring people in the economic atmosphere.

On the second issue, I have just started a small fund with some key countries in the Middle East, in which I've said, listen, let's not just open, again, a fund with, you know, all these kind of programs that everybody can subscribe to, and then "I'm sure it's good." I don't want it to be something Western. There's enough double standards. People look at us not necessarily as the great bringers of democracy.

These are the issues we should be talking about. It's their own literature, it's film-making, it's culture -- but also, especially, local

culture — not necessarily what we want. And we have asked our embassies to look in six countries, what would be the best way to do this. And this includes your kind of proposals.

MR. BENJAMIN: Okay. Well, we are really more than out of time. But for that reason we are more than grateful to Minister Bert Koenders, to Dr. Sayyid Syeed for being here today and for guiding us through a really fascinating discussion of some of the truly thorny issues that we will face in the years ahead.

I hope you'll join me in thanking them for their insights.

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